DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 449 530 CS 217 419

TITLE	Women in the White House. [Lesson Plan].
INSTITUTION	National Endowment for the Humanities (NFAH), Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	MCI WorldCom, Arlington, VA.; Council of the Great City Schools, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	5p.; Small print in the column of text on the right side of the document may not reproduce well.
AVAILABLE FROM	Full text at: http://edsitement.neh.gov/lessonplans/firstladies.html.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Biographies; Class Activities; *Females; Intermediate Grades; *Language Arts; Lesson Plans; Literature Appreciation; Secondary Education; Social Studies; United States History
IDENTIFIERS	*First Ladies (United States)

ABSTRACT

In this lesson plan, students in grades 6-8 explore the role and impact of recent First Ladies through research and family interviews, then work in groups to present a documentary portrait to the class. Through these 7 lessons, students will: (1) learn about the political and non-political careers of recent First Ladies; (2) explore the possibilities and limitations of the position of First Lady; and (3) conduct historical research through oral history interviews. Intended for grades 6-8, the plan notes subject areas covered (literature/biography and U.S. history), time required to complete the lesson, skills used and taught in the lesson, and the standards developed by professional associations or governments that are related to the lesson. Activities to extend the lesson conclude the lesson plan. (SR)

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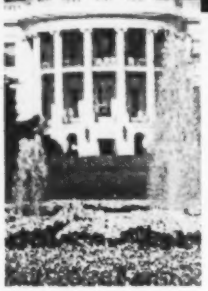
Women in the White House



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Lesson Plans

SEARCH EDSITEMENT

Introduction

In this lesson, students explore the role and impact of recent First Ladies through research and family interviews, then work in groups to present a documentary portrait to the class.

Learning Objectives

(1) To learn about the political and non-political careers of recent First Ladies. (2) To explore the possibilities and limitations of the position of First Lady. (3) To conduct historical research through oral history interviews.

Lesson Plan

Guiding Question: How have recent First Ladies contributed to American society?

1 Begin by talking with students about the First Lady. What do we mean by that term? Who is the First Lady today? Who are some other First Ladies the students may know about (e.g., Martha Washington, Eleanor Roosevelt)? What does the First Lady do? Explain that in this lesson they will learn more about the role of the First Lady by exploring one recent First Lady's career in the White House.

2 Divide the class into small research teams of 3-4 students and assign each team one of these recent former-First Ladies:

- Barbara Bush
- Nancy Reagan
- Rosalyn Carter
- Betty Ford
- Pat Nixon
- Lady Bird Johnson
- Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis

3 Have students research their First Lady using the resources of the National First Ladies Library website on EDSITEment. Click the "Bibliography" button on the website's homepage for a visual index of all the nation's First Ladies, shown in chronological order. Click any picture to access bibliographic information about that First Lady, including lists of magazine articles, books, and manuscript collections, as well as a link to a brief biography of the First Lady at the White House website.

- For additional background, students can read a multi-part history of "Past First Families" at the White House website, and take a "Historical Tour of the White House" using an

SUBJECT AREAS

Literature: Biography

History: U.S.: Women's Rights/History

GRADE LEVELS

6-8

TIME REQUIRED

One to two class periods

SKILLS

historical comprehension
historical analysis and interpretation
oral history interviewing techniques
information gathering and research
critical thinking
collaboration
Internet skills

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

1. Culture (more)
2. Time, Continuity, and Change (more)
4. Individual Development and Identity (more)
6. Power, Authority, and Governance (more)

Standards for the English Language Arts

7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. (more)
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge. (more)
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning,

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interactive map.

- Students can also learn more about their First Ladies at the Presidential Libraries, which are accessible through The Digital Classroom website on EDSITEment. Click "Presidential Libraries" in the left-hand column on this website's homepage for a list of online resources that includes the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library and Museum, the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum, the Nixon Presidential Materials collection (which includes a link to the Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace), the Gerald R. Ford Library and Museum, the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, and the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum.

4 As they gather facts about their First Lady, have each student research team brainstorm questions they will ask older family members about the First Lady's time in the White House. Direct students to draw up a list of at least five questions that all members of the group will use as the basis of their at-home interviews. These should include:

- Biographical questions about the First Lady's personality and memorable moments of her White House career.
- Viewpoint questions about the issues she championed as a First Lady and her impact on public opinion.
- Contribution questions that ask family members to sum up what the First Lady accomplished while in the White House or what she will be remembered for.
- Assessment questions that ask how the First Lady compares to other First Ladies the family member has known.

5 Have each student team member interview one or two older family members who lived during the First Lady's time in the White House. Students can record their interviews using a tape recorder or video camera, conduct the interview by email, or simply take notes. Encourage students to ask family members for their personal impressions and memories of the First Lady in order to gain a sense of her relationship with the American public and the role she played in society.

6 After they have conducted their interviews, have each student research team prepare a five to ten minute documentary portrait of their First Lady for presentation to the class. These presentations should include:

- A brief outline of events during the First Lady's time in the White House: major political and social developments, along with other historical landmarks.
- A short account of the First Lady's accomplishments: issues she championed, programs she supported, policies she helped establish.
- A description of the First Lady's influence on Americans of her time, based on the opinions and recollections gathered from the students' family members: What was she like? What did people think of her? Does she seem more or less significant looking back on those times today?

7 Close this lesson with a class discussion on how students think a man will fit into the First Lady's role when Americans elect their first woman President. To what degree is this a

enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information). (more)

gender-specific role, a focus for public concern with stereotypically feminine issues (family, children, health, beauty, culture)? To what degree is it a role open to any "partner in power" willing to take advantage of the public forum afforded by the White House? Conclude this discussion by having students write a brief imaginative news story about a male "First Lady" of the future, describing what he would say and do on a visit to your community.

Extending the Lesson

Have students use the resources of the National First Ladies Library website to investigate how the role of the First Lady has changed throughout our nation's history. To what extent have our First Ladies reflected prevailing American attitudes about "a woman's place" in society? To what extent have they helped change attitudes?